

## BOOKS

The book is misnamed. Abrashoff may characterize his subject as “management,” but it is immediately apparent that he is talking about leadership. He deals not with disciplined, controlled execution of an exhaustively prescribed plan, but rather with innovative, creative solutions to both traditional and novel problems. The tools for those solutions—the media through which organizations achieve enduring, superior performance—are people.

The book is more than a “brag.” Abrashoff, former commander of the guided missile destroyer USS Benfold, provides hard numbers that show reduced costs in operations and maintenance, increased retention rates, and improved tactical performance. He provides anecdotal evidence of improved motivation and morale—those unquantifiable, almost magical elements that enable people to move mountains when the need arises.

The key to all this is in the book’s title. Early in command, Abrashoff was approached by a sailor who had a problem. As commander, he could have issued instructions as a solution. Such a traditional response would have been expected. It also would have perpetuated a dependent, cautious command environment that had not served the ship well in the past. Instead, Abrashoff invited/challenged the sailor to suggest a solution. After all—and here’s the zinger—*It’s your ship*.

This simple yet powerful turnaround became the command philosophy and the motto for the ship. Using it as a foundation, Abrashoff began a leadership journey that he details in a conversational, engaging way throughout the book.

He documents the journey by way of a series of thematic chapters that are subdivided into central leadership points, which are in turn illuminated by examples from experience. This gives the book a comfortable, practical feel that readers will find compelling.

For example, Chapter 6 is titled, “Look For Results, Not Salutes.” It includes: help knock down the barriers, let your crew feel free to speak up, free your crew from top-down-itis, nurture the freedom to fail, innovation knows no rank, and challenging your crew beyond its reach. Ten other chapters are organized in a similar manner. In all, they cover the bases of leadership in an environment of importance, opportunity, and risk.

Abrashoff’s anecdotes are informative and say as much about organization culture as they do about Benfold leadership. In one example, Abrashoff describes his authorized purchase of a commercial off-the-shelf item of foul-weather clothing that was superior to the more expensive Navy supply item. The crew loved it. When the crew of another ship saw the item, they wanted it too. The commander of the other ship—an officer senior to Abrashoff—responded in a predictable way: he ordered Abrashoff to recall the item from the Benfold crew because it was causing dissatisfaction among his own crew. Abrashoff responded predictably: he refused. The senior commander relented, but could have handled the matter differently had he viewed the positive effect the items had on the Benfold’s crew as an opportunity to obtain collective achievement from an individual organization success, or “A rising tide lifts all boats.”

Army project managers can gain much from this book. The Navy experiences—even those involving junior enlisted matters—translate readily as concepts and principles to a project management environment. Abrashoff’s first-person account offers wisdom and insight that makes *It’s Your Ship* well worth the read. Army project managers—and unit leaders, too—will find application of the Benfold experience a short leap. After all, *it’s your project*.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Oxygen Generators Reduce Deployment Weight

In support of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Army medical community recently shipped an oxygen generation system to Afghanistan that weighed a little more than a ton (or the equivalent of 13 oxygen cylinders). The off-the-shelf oxygen generator produces 120 liters of oxygen a minute continuously and can refill cylinders. Troops still took eight oxygen cylinders with them to provide several hours of backup capability, but those eight can be refilled, thus eliminating the need for replacement cylinders.

Two additional generators are in development. One, a pressure-swing generator, takes up the space of a 2-foot by 2-foot by 3-foot box and weighs 250 pounds. Its pump uses an 8-horsepower motor, turns at 125,000 revolutions per minute, weighs 10 pounds, and delivers the same amount of oxygen as the recently deployed model.

The second, a promising ceramic oxygen generator, is more portable than the pressure-swing type. The ceramic oxygen generator fits in a 4- by 8- by 6-inch box that weighs 20 pounds. Using electricity, aircraft jet engine metal, and ceramic, this generator produces oxygen from regular air by using electricity to draw oxygen atoms through a ceramic membrane. The atoms are

then collected and delivered directly to a patient. The ceramic oxygen generators work unfazed during chemical and biological attacks. Although the generator's high operating heat disables chemical agents, these agents are unable to pass through the ceramic material like the oxygen ions can.

### Testbed Finds Home In Modular Tents

A five-person team at the Army Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC) was charged in June 2001 to create a prototype digital, deployable field medical hospital in 1 year. Based on requirements for future Army shelter systems developed by the Army Medical Department Center and School, the fruit of the team's labors now resides neatly inside five Alaska shelter tents next door to the 6th Medical Logistics Management Center building at Fort Detrick, MD. Stocked with the latest in commercial off-the-shelf portable medical technology such as portable anesthesia and digital X-ray machines, the Forward Deployable Digital Medical Treatment Facility is a research platform that TATRC officials hope will shape future Army field medical environments.

### Army Launches New Contracting Initiative

In recent years, senior acquisition leaders from the Army and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) have become very concerned that some of their incentive programs are not yielding the anticipated benefits (i.e., enhanced performance and lower costs). In fact, there is concern that contractors are being encouraged to achieve the opposite of what the Army and DOD intends and needs. Consequently, in February 1999, Dr. Jacques S. Gansler, then Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, issued a memorandum to the Service Acquisition Executives re-emphasizing the importance of appropriately using the "award fee" as an effective motivator for excellence in contractor performance. His memo highlighted the areas of quality, timeliness, technical ingenuity, and cost-effective management for seeking performance improvement.

In November 1999, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Procurement Dr. Kenneth J. Oscar expressed his concerns to the Army acquisition community that award fees issued to contractors are not commensurate with their levels of performance. As a result of

these concerns, the effectiveness of long-standing incentive programs are being re-examined with a fresh view toward realizing greater benefits.

Recently, the Award Term Contracts Incentive Program was launched as a 3-year pilot. This program establishes stable partnering relationships between government and industry to provide long-term sources of quality products and services. In addition to enabling the government to form long-term relationships with proven high-performing contractors, the pilot program also enables contractors to make investments in process improvements that few companies would make when dealing with short-term awards.

One of the first questions people ask concerning this concept is how it differs from award fee. Under award fee, we expect to reward contractors for excellent performance by granting the award fee. However, one of the problems we have experienced in the Army is that contractors often receive award fees for less-than-excellent performance (i.e., good or barely above marginal). According to a recent Army Audit Agency audit conducted at Army commands, it was found that either the contractors' performances were not being evaluated or award fees were granted in spite of less-than-excellent performance.

Under "award term," contractors will receive periodic performance evaluations and scores. Based on these evaluations and scores, contractors may receive contract extensions for excellent performance and cost savings or realize a reduction in the period of performance for not rendering excellent performance.

The award term process is best suited for cost-plus-incentive fee, firm-fixed-price, and fixed-price incentive contracts, particularly in the service arena. Naturally, cost-plus-award fee contracts are excluded from this process because the objective in award term is to achieve a level of performance that other incentives are not achieving. Under the pilot program, the Army expects contracting officers in their respective commands to make the decision concerning contract types that are most suitable for award term application.

During the 3-year pilot phase of this program, contracting activities involved in the pilot will provide status updates to HQDA on an annual basis. Based on lessons learned and feedback from the field, HQDA will determine the merits of institutionalizing this concept.

*The preceding article was written by Esther Morse, Director, Procurement and Industrial Base Policy, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Procurement.*